

most expensive in U.S. history and helped propel new campaign finance reform. It was this first-hand experience which convinced me that our elections have increasingly come to be polluted by ever-increasing amounts of unregulated outside spending.

Millions of dollars in soft money, spending that avoided limits because of misguided legal distinctions between contributions to a candidate and independent expenditures in support of a candidate, plagued that 2000 race and almost every major Federal race since.

On my very first day in Congress, I cosponsored the McCain-Feingold Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act, which attempted to ban soft money expenditures and allowed for public financing of campaigns. The bill passed, and for a brief window, the campaign finance system became more transparent and limited. That was, sadly, short lived.

With Citizens United, the Supreme Court struck down decades of restrictions on corporate campaign spending and freed corporations to spend unlimited funds to run campaign advertisements.

The court has also allowed wealthy individuals and groups to spend with impunity, with only a theoretical restriction that they do not coordinate with campaigns, but the reality is that the FEC has dismissed 29 cases in which super-PACs were suspected of illegally coordinating with candidates without even investigating the claims.

Frustrating as it is for a candidate to contend with attacks by super-PACs or soft money, as I was, disclosure laws at least allow us to alert voters to the special interest which is behind those expenditures. Candidates being drowned out in attacks paid for by dark money, however, don't have that luxury.

Groups who raise dark money do so by exploiting IRS regulations, designating them "social welfare nonprofits," which allow them to operate tax exempt and raise unlimited money completely anonymously.

Nothing about funneling millions in secret dollars to support campaigns could be construed to be in the interest of social welfare—nothing. Social welfare nonprofits are supposed to limit their political activity, but IRS audits, even of groups that spend vast amounts of their time and budget in support of candidates, are extremely rare.

Investigations into complaints of abuse can take years, at which point an election will long be over, the damage done.

The Supreme Court has overturned decades of legal precedent, the regulatory process is at a standstill, and still, we watch billions pour into campaigns and in increasingly anonymous fashion.

Sadly, we are left with one option, a constitutional amendment that allows Congress to set reasonable limits on both donations and expenditures and shines the light of day on both.

IRAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Ms. FOXX) for 5 minutes.

Ms. FOXX. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to join my colleagues to express a deep concern about the ongoing negotiations with Iran over the country's nuclear capabilities.

As many of my colleagues have noted on the floor of this House, preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon is critical to securing peace in the region and protecting U.S. interests, including our close ally Israel.

It was good to hear Secretary Kerry's recent commitment not "to shave anywhere at the margins in order to just get an agreement" and to work for an agreement that will pass scrutiny. However, media reports from the negotiations in Vienna indicate that Iran has tried to renegotiate the previously released framework and continues to demand further concessions from international negotiators.

Among the latest demands from Tehran is that all United Nations sanctions against the country, including the ban on the import or export of conventional arms, be lifted as part of any deal.

Well, I have a response to that demand: unacceptable. Lifting the arms embargo would serve only to further destabilize the Middle East and accelerate Iran's arming of Shiite militias.

The Iranians have also sought to keep hidden Iran's current and previous efforts to gain nuclear weapons capability. How can the international community know with certainty that Iran is complying with an agreement to reduce significantly its enrichment activities if the full extent of these activities is kept secret?

It defies logic that such a request should be made and makes far less sense for such a request to be given any serious consideration.

Likewise, demands to limit IAEA inspectors to select sites, to install absurd bureaucratic processes to access additional sites, and to prohibit altogether inspections of so-called military sites should be fully rejected.

Ultimately, it is critical that any deal prevents Iran from gaining nuclear weapons capabilities and ensures that international inspectors can validate their adherence to an agreement's negotiated terms. If Iran cannot negotiate in good faith, then perhaps it is time to leave the negotiating table altogether.

STRONG STEM EDUCATION POLICY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. COURTNEY) for 5 minutes.

Mr. COURTNEY. Mr. Speaker, in a few short hours, we are going to be voting in this Chamber on a rewrite of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which is long overdue.

It has been 13 years since the No Child Left Behind Act was passed, and many educators and probably all Members have heard a lot of the clumsy and unworkable provisions that need a rewrite. More importantly, there are other reasons why it is time for a new law for our K-12 system.

Educating our children is a dynamic process, and everything from technology in the classroom, as well as the workforce needs of our national economy, have drastically changed in the last 13 years.

Clearly, as a nation, we need to use this rewrite of Federal education law as an opportunity to equip our Nation, and particularly our children and grandchildren, with the tools they need to succeed.

One area which we all know needs updating and strengthening is the area of STEM education—science, technology, engineering, and math. Employers all across the country are desperate to try and find incoming young people into our workforce who have these skills to succeed.

The good news is, in the last 13 years, STEM occupations have grown three times faster than non-STEM occupations. In addition, the average income is two times higher in terms of the wages of STEM-educated workers compared to non-STEM. That is the good news.

The bad news is that only 16 percent of graduating high school seniors are interested in STEM. If you drill down deeper, young girls and young minorities are woefully underrepresented in the single digits.

Clearly, we need to move stronger as a nation in the area of STEM. If you look globally, China is producing 23 percent of the world's STEM degree graduates—the U.S., only 10 percent.

Mr. Speaker, if you go back 58 years ago, our 34th President, Dwight Eisenhower, confronted a similar moment of crisis in terms of our education system.

In October 1957, the Soviet Union launched the Sputnik satellite, which shocked our Nation. We realized we were falling behind and that we needed to step up our game in terms of our educational and research system. This Republican President led the charge to pass the National Defense Education Act in 1958, which boosted and set a national goal, a national priority, for science and research across our country.

At the time that he signed the bill in 1958, he said that, in both education and research, we needed to redouble our exertions, which will be necessary on the part of all Americans if we are to rise to the demands of our times.

He also noted that this bill, the National Defense Education Act, back in 1958, would "do much to strengthen our American system of education so it can meet the broad and increasing demands imposed upon it by considerations of basic national security."

Fast forward 57 years, we now have a national STEM education coalition